

Solving the Problem of Illegal Immigration Requires a Unified Effort

Like most Americans, I welcome immigrants, but it has to be done legally. That's how my grandparents did it when they came here from Hungary – legally; they were proud to become Americans. Today, however, all of America faces a common and increasing problem: illegal immigration.

For too many years we have turned a blind eye to the problem of illegal immigration as millions of people streamed across our borders. People in Washington are not the only ones out of touch with this issue. America is filled with state and local leaders that want to put their heads in the sand and pretend that this is a federal problem and they have no role in it. It's not. That's the source of the problem: illegals assume that once they get to the heart of the country they are home free -- and too often they are right.

Just like the War on Drugs is not exclusively a federal problem, the War on Illegal Immigration is not just a federal problem either. Millions of illegals are no longer just along our borders but are spread throughout America, including a large number in Oklahoma. It is a combined problem that requires resources and commitment at all levels. States, communities and local officials must help federal efforts or we'll get nowhere in our fight against illegal immigration.

Since state and local law enforcement agencies have the most contact with illegals, they make the obvious choice in forming the front lines of this fight. Unless they're involved in supporting our federal efforts, we'll never detect, detain and deport those already here. To do this, they need special training and now that training is becoming available.

That's why I helped lead the efforts in Congress to battle illegal immigration by funding special training that helps local law enforcement cooperate with federal authorities on immigration issues. In my role as a member of the Homeland Security subcommittee, I pushed for nationwide funding that now allows U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to offer a specialized five-week training course for state and local law officers.

The course focuses on immigration law, civil rights and other law enforcement issues involving illegal immigration. When detained, the illegals are turned over to ICE, and I've helped increase ICE's resources significantly so it can pick up these illegals and return them to their own country. I have even contacted state and local officials to make them aware of the program and describing how they can take advantage of it.

Illegal immigration causes problems all across America in all of our communities. Together we can win this fight, eliminate these problems and restore respect for our nation's laws.

God bless Oklahoma and God bless the United States.

Ernest Istook